Bryce Hickerty T00242104

Freund’s article discusses the importance and the evolution of storytelling from a historical context, and attempts to understand the meaning behind how stories are constructed, as well as the way by which storytelling has come to permeate both the academic and public world, and what ramifications this may have for the practice of oral history. He argues that the increased emphasis on storytelling in modern American society is not only a reflection of an attempt to accurately capture the “truth” of the world around us, but stems from an increasingly therapy and self-help focused society which reflects many of the trauma’s of America’s past and acts as a tool for social change and individual empowerment1. In this way Freund argues that oral history is important not only as evidence of the “truth” of the past, but also as a form of mass therapy, commemorating the traumas of the past to make them more palatable and aid in psychological healing in the present2. Freund’s work is of particular interest to my research as it highlights the inaccuracy of self-portrayal and in the creation of a historical narrative, as well as the influence of morality on shaping historical work. Storytelling therefore is a process by which the “truth” is never really revealed, but constructed. Similarly, Field’s article stresses the importance of oral history as a form of therapy, by which historians conducting oral history offer a venue for interviewees to express and reconstruct their sense of self3. Self-history is therefore by definition a sanitized history, whereby memories are selected social constructions which do not necessarily reflect the actual truth of the past, but rather the biases inherent in a given culture, which is in-itself meaningful. The emotionally-charged exchanges between interviewer and interviewee therefore, are influential in the recording of oral history4. By implication then, Field’s work is relevant to my own research as it highlights the influence of emotion in the expression of self-history, calling attention to potential biases which may present themselves in the expression of such histories.

Shopes article explores the meaning and definition of oral history, and how oral history is reflected in historical discourse. Shopes argues that “Availability for general research, reinterpretation, and verification defines oral history5”. Meaning that without being available to the academic public, a given source cannot constitute an oral history. Shopes also calls attention to the manner in which oral history is collected, pointing out that in the process of creating history, choices are made regarding what evidence is seen as important, and what should be discarded6, meaning that the creation of history is by definition bias, and subject to outside influence. Shopes article is of particular interest to my research as it again highlights the importance of social and cultural constructions as an influence for self-portrayals, and how these constructs evolve over time7. As well, Shopes highlights the importance of individual personal experience, how intent is rendered via the creation of self-history, and self-history as an expression of the experience of the past8.

In my own research I looked at Martin L. Davies article “Disobedience Reconsidered: History, Theory, and the Morality of Scholarship”. In this article Davies grapples with the influence of moral climate in the creation of history. In Davies argument, he points to changing societal norms and shows how the increased public presence of previously marginalized groups has contributed to reimagined histories9. “Truth”, according to Davies, therefore manifests itself through historical discourse and re-analysis. By historicizing experience, the practice of history therefore creates its own unique psychological construct which does not necessarily reflect the “truth”, but merely mimics it10. Davies work also highlights the importance of political, social, and economic influence as reflecting themselves in morality. Finally, Davies concludes that disobedience from previous historical interpretations helps create history by confronting a historicized world in which actual truth may be hindered from being exposed11. By straying from accepted discourse when creating history, and understanding history as an ever-evolving, fundamentally bias practice, historians may more readily contribute to historical understanding12. This article is important to my own research as it again highlights the importance of considering any change in moral norms and societal expectations when considering a source such as A. May’s memoir, and stresses the importance of understanding the wider social, cultural, and economic influences when evaluating self-history.

Endnotes

1. A. Freund, “Under Storytelling’s Spell? Oral History in a Neoliberal Age,” *Oral History Review*, (2015) 20

2. Ibid, 26

3. S. Field, “Beyond ‘Healing’: Trauma, Oral History and Regeneration,” *Oral History* (2006) 31

4. Ibid, 37

5. L. Shopes, “‘Insights and Oversights’: Reflections on the Documentary Tradition and the Theoretical Turn in Oral History,” *Oral History Review* (2014) 261

6. Ibid, 262

7. Ibid, 263

8. Ibid, 267

9. Martin L. Davies, “Disobedience Reconsidered: History, Theory, and the Morality of Scholarship.” *Rethinking History,* (2013) 192

10. Ibid, 194

11. Ibid, 207

12. Ibid, 208

Bibliography

Davies, Martin L. “Disobedience Reconsidered: History, Theory, and the Morality of Scholarship.” *Rethinking History,* 17, 2 (2013): 191-210.

Field, S., “Beyond ‘Healing’: Trauma, Oral History and Regeneration,”Oral History, 34, 1 (2006): 31- 42.

Freund, A., “Under Storytelling’s Spell? Oral History in a Neoliberal Age,” Oral History Review, 42, 1 (2015): 96-132.

Shopes, L., “‘Insights and Oversights’: Reflections on the Documentary Tradition and the Theoretical Turn in Oral History,” Oral History Review, 41, 2 (2014): 257-268.